Dionysios Kapsaskis
University of Roehampton

Article Accepted for publication in the Journal *Translation Studies*

Translation as a critical tool in film analysis: Watching Yorgos Lanthimos' *Dogtooth* through a translational prism

Abstract

This article argues that the study of translation as it occurs in cinema at both production and distribution level can provide a new critical perspective through which to analyse film. Based on recent research by translation theorists, but drawing equally on film studies, the article shifts the focus from translation to cinema. It explains how a translational approach can help revisit foundational ideas in cinema, such as the realism of cinematic representation and the universality of film language. The analysis will focus on *Dogtooth* (2009) by Greek director Yorgos Lanthimos. Investigation of diegetic occurrences of translation, but also of the film's English subtitles, will show how *Dogtooth* employs strategies of mistranslation, re-translation and performative re-enactment so as to make statements about the politics and aesthetics of mainstream cinema. Translation analysis of this kind will reveal aspects of cinema that are not easily discerned when looked at from monolingual critical angles.

Keywords: Film translation, subtitling, cinematic realism, universality, cultural periphery, Greek cinema

Over the past twenty years, research investigating the relationship between cinema and translation has been prolific. From early on, such research has focused on translation practices that take place during the film distribution stage, and specifically on the techniques, norms, history and overall representational functions of audiovisual translation (see Díaz Cintas 2004). More recently, the presence of translation as a theme, a narrative device or a diegetic practice during the film production stage has proved to be a fertile and increasingly appealing area. In both cases, the transactions between film and translation tend to be studied following translation studies methodologies, driven by a desire to better understand the role of translation and translators in audiovisual media (Nornes 2007, 1-4; Cronin 2009, 1; O'Sullivan 2011, 1). By contrast, awareness among film theorists of the presence and mediation of translation in cinema remains relatively low (Flynn 2016). As a case in point, Dimitris Eleftheriotis (2010, 186-187), has written about the "stubborn refusal" of many canonical film theorists whose understanding of film depended on translation "to consider that subtitles might be theoretically significant". According to Eleftheriotis, this amounts to a denial of difference and suggests a certain disciplinary elitism among Eurocentric film theory paradigms. If this is true, it makes it all the more imperative that translation studies as a distinct body of knowledge and way of thinking about texts and transculturality is used to inform our understanding of cinema. As I will argue in this article, because film so abundantly represents and is represented by translation, a translational approach can provide specific insights to cinema as practice and institution, while it can also help to analyse individual films. This article will not elaborate on the concept of "translational approach" from an epistemic point of view; instead, it will explore cultural and aesthetic aspects of cinema that strongly indicate the relevance of translation to film and film theory, before exemplifying translational criticism of film with reference to a recent Greek film, Yorgos Lanthimos' *Dogtooth* (2009).

Translation and the language(s) of film

At an empirical level, the reason why it is important for film to engage with the question of translation is that, for a significant proportion - if not a majority - of viewers worldwide, the experience of film is

so often an "experience of translation". Abé Mark Nornes (2007, 176-177) used this expression in the strong sense of an attitude towards cinematic translation that values "experimentation with language and its grammatical, morphological and visual qualities". However, the conventional experience of viewing subtitled or dubbed film is also, in the broad sense, an experience of translation. The quality of the experience of viewing translated film may well be mitigated by the normative rule of imperceptibility which specifies that the best subtitling and dubbing should be felt as completely transparent by the spectator (Díaz-Cintas and Remael 2007, 40). Following techniques of mimesis and synchronization, such as lip synchronisation and the suturing of subtitles (which I will explain below), awareness of translation's active contribution in the film-viewing experience is diluted into a general sensation of presence in the mediated environment, a "perceptive illusion of non-mediation" (Wissmath, Weibel and Groner 2009, 116). On the other hand, the quality of the translational experience refers to issues of representational accuracy and adequacy of translation, as well as to questions of politics and ideology, all of which suggest that transparency can never be total. As far as the experience of film-viewing is concerned, then, translation's semantic and aesthetic mediation raises issues of immersion into foreign film, or, conversely, produces effects of defamiliarization, which Film Studies cannot afford to ignore.

However, film is concerned with translation in ways that go beyond the mimetic, that is, beyond the semantic transfer of the dialogue, the transmission of authorial intentions or the representation of particular cultures and identities. Studying – or simply watching - film from a translational perspective raises issues that have to do with cinema's historical context and the cultural geography of the production and circulation of films. Two of cinema's structural characteristics expose it to the operation of translation with such consistency that translation becomes indissociable from cinema's history. The first is the use of synchronized sound, which facilitated, firstly, the construction of coherent cinematic narratives about national identity and, secondly, the infiltration of these narratives with universalist values so that they could be accepted by foreign film markets (Pérez-Gonzáles 2014, 33). The second is film's mobility and reproducibility which enabled its global circulation as a commodity to be consumed beyond national and linguistic barriers. Translation has been one of the most effective ways of negotiating the tension between the local and the global. As Nataša Ďurovičová (2010, 94) put it with reference to the early days of sound cinema, "The key prerequisite for breaking up the film traffic gridlock erupting when the mobile medium of moving pictures became obliged to fit itself to the scale of a national language was to find adequate protocols of linguistic transfer". Ďurovičová's argument concerns the choice of audiovisual translation modality (or "protocol"), such as subtitling, dubbing and voice-over, a choice charged with the task of consolidating geopolitical asymmetries and "uneven flows of exchange" (2010, 96) between different lingua-cultures. Beyond the specifics of that choice, a fundamental observation should be that a translational approach to film forces us to think not generically, in terms of film "circulation" and "exchange", but specifically, in terms of directionality, history and politics.

Nornes (2007, 4) favours the term "traffic" over that of "circulation" to designate global film movement, as it "points to the propelled directionality of textual sources and targets, of films imagined in the built world of one language transported to be re-imagined and reconstructed within another". "Traffic" raises questions of cultural legitimacy and political hegemony and determines perceptions of "minor" and "major" that affect film circulation and reception. For instance, the universal allure of Hollywood is in great part due to the fact that it constitutes the *topos* from which film emerges in a hypothetical state of linguistic transparency (Shochat and Stam 1985, 36). The language of the Hollywood blockbuster is a *lingua franca* that relegates accessibility through translation to the status of an afterthought reserved for the distribution stage (see also Romero Fresco 2013, 206). As it has been argued (Apter 2013, 19), the assumption of translatability is tantamount to a faith that everything extant is infinitely appropriable - in this case by the dominant lingua-culture. Conversely, it can be claimed that the marked occurrence of translation in film, whether in the guise of subtitles, dubbing, and voice-over or of any form of language switch that happens intra- or extra-diagetically, signals the presence of alterity, thereby restoring (every individual) film to historically and geographically specific contexts. In this sense, the historical dynamics and power asymmetries involved in the production and traffic of film are most unambiguously sensed by audiovisual translation practitioners and theorists. A translational approach to film opens up and reinvigorates questions about film's historicity and the cultural conditions in which it operates.

Moreover, studying film through the prism of translation helps to correlate historical aspects of film as cultural institution with formal aspects of film as representational practice. Having in mind subtitles as a material and aesthetic intervention in the filmic body, Ďurovičová (2010, 96) suggests that translation should be studied as "an integral layer of spatial figuration, superimposed onto and hovering over both the cinematic institution and the representational field of the screen in which specific emergent transnational formations then can become apparent". What is it, then, that translation renders apparent about film? Wherever present – either as part of the cinematic narrative or as a process of interlinguistic transfer for the benefit of foreign audiences – translation tests cinema's intrinsic claims to the universality of its language and to the realism of its representations. As it has been pointed out, these claims constitute interrelated aspects of cinema's foundational impulse. Writing from a translational perspective, Michael Cronin (2009, xiii) referred to "the early aspirations of the cinema to be a universal medium, and the intensely international nature of film production and distribution from a very early period". The cultural/institutional element is inflected with the formal/representational element. The universality of the medium is a function of its ability to create a unique cinematic language that is globally understood. Miriam Hansen has argued that the desired universality of early American cinema depended on the construction of a spectator who was literate in the unique new language of film, often at the expense of his or her gender, ethnic and social particularities. According to Hansen (1991, 16),

> the ideological objective of constructing a unified subject of – and for – mass-cultural consumption, of integrating empirically diverse audiences with this goal, was troped in the ambitious celebration of film as a new universal language, as a historically unique chance to "repair the ruins of Babel".

The universal language of cinema is inscribed from the start within a messianic project, that of restoring the unity of human voice against the plurality of tongues (an idea akin to Benjamin's "pure language" [1992]). However, approaching cinema from the point of view of translation forces us to resist the totalizing tendency and think in precisely the opposite direction, namely, in terms of specific languages rather than language in general. In his seminal essay "The Cinema: Language or Language System?", Christian Metz (1991, 69) rejects the idea of cinema as "visual Esperanto", precisely because it connotes that cinema is a *langue*, that is, a semiotic system as any verbal language. Looking at this issue from a translational perspective, he makes a distinction between visual language (the "image discourse", or "*discours imagé*") which is "the height of translatable", and verbal linguistic systems, which are "more or less translatable". It is therefore the difference between the relative untranslatability of languages and the extreme translatability of the image that keeps film firmly this side of Babel - that is, in historical time.

The universality of the language of cinema is denied by languages in the plural. As Metz (1991, 56) noted, "In the period when the cinema considered itself a veritable language system, its attitude toward verbal languages was one of utmost disdain". The loss of artistic aura with the advent of sound was noted with more than a hint of regret by the British film theorist Paul Rotha who, experiencing the transition from silent to sound film, argued that cinema risked losing its artistic purport:

> The great work of art, the symphony or the painting, appeals with equal force to *any person irrespective of his or her nationality*. That factor was the whole basis of the silent cinema. Its universal appeal made it great industry. […] [T]he fact remains that literary speech strikes a fatal blow straight at the heart of the cinema. (1931, 22 my emphasis)

Rotha suggests a state of fall from the universal to the particular, from the generic "any person" to the individual, gendered spectator with a specific nationality, and from language in general to specific languages ("literary speech"). Using plainer but quite similar terms, in an article entitled "The Fall of Hollywood", screenwriter Dalton Trumbo (1933) considered that the advent of the talkies amounted to "the destruction of pure cinema" and explained "the loss of the silent cinema's universal appeal" as follows:

> When a Berlin butcher attends an American movie and beholds Greta Garbo as Mata Hari making love in guttural English with a Swedish accent to an oily Latin impersonating a Russian officer, he suddenly

> remembers the League of Nations and the abomination of Versailles, hastens from the theatre and never is seen again.

Trumbo's humorous remark reflects even more vividly the challenge posed to cinematic illusion as soon as it was exposed to the reality of linguistic difference, locality, and historical particularity.

In the same way that languages confront cinema with what Rotha (1931, 22) called "The problem of Universal appeal", they also challenge cinema's claim to realist representation. André Bazin (1967, 21) famously stated that realism is "the guiding myth, inspiring the invention of cinema". In cinema, Bazin envisaged an "integral realism", that is, "a recreation of the world in its own image" (1967, 21), therefore welcoming sound and colour as technical achievements that would disturb the visual purity of photography. However, rather than this unmediated reflexion of reality, cinematic realism came to mean the illusion of verisimilitude based on techniques of narrative continuity and motivation that characterize mainstream film aesthetics. The critique of cinema's dominant realist form concerns the authorial control of the spectators' access to reality through the selective use of cinematic techniques and narrative devices (Jay 1993, 460-480; Eleftheriotis 2010, 38-45). In line with Hansen's argument, above, the technical and expressive means of the medium are exploited so that the subjective reality that is framed and projected on screen passes as objective and even normative. In his comparison between theatrical and cinematic realism, Metz argued that the impression of reality is conveyed in cinema thanks to "the *partial reality* integrated into the means of the spectacle" (1991: 12-13, emphasis in the original). For its part, "the art of theater is based on means that are too real", in the sense that the spectacle of theatre affords total access to the diegetic world, whereas that of cinema does not. Transposing the comparison within the limits of cinema, Cronin adopts the following distinction between empiricist and emotional realism from work by Ien Ang (1985).

> Empiricist realism is the attempt to create authentic settings, to put *the detailed life of the everyday on screen*, whereas emotional realism is primarily concerned not so much with credible settings as with a concentration with characters, modes of action and conflict situations, which are believable or credible within the context of possible life experiences. *The dreams must be real but not too real* (2009, 15, my emphasis).

In both accounts, that of cinematic representation discussed by Cronin (and Ang) and that of cinematic/theatrical representation discussed by Metz, it is proposed that realism in film is more effective when it is not "too real" or, more specifically, when it is the result of a selective exclusion of aspects of reality. Cronin's account in particular suggests that mimetic authenticity ("the detailed life of the everyday on screen") is not sufficient to produce a sense of narrative credibility. It is possible then to argue that, in mainstream film aesthetics, the selective exclusion of multilingualism is one device among many in the service of creating an impression (as opposed to a reflexion) of reality. Exclusion, in the sense that, however universal the repertoire of cinematic images might be, reality is self-evidently multilingual and cannot be mimetically represented as if it were not. Exclusion, also, because cinema is a mobile, cosmopolitan and migratory means, thus inhabiting a global space in which monolingualism is the exception rather than the rule.

Consequently, there are two ways in which a translational prism can make apparent the limits of cinematic realism, and they have to do with the uses of translation in film during the production or distribution stages, respectively. On the one hand, if points of view tend to be heterolingual, to use a Bakhtinian term, then translational criticism of film would highlight the idiosyncrasy and limitations of a realism that fails to take linguistic difference seriously into account. On the other hand, insofar as the film-viewing experience is so often an experience of translation, as argued above, the "impression of reality" is frequently mitigated by the difference between the language of the film and the language of the spectator. Both forms of translational transaction between film and languages concern and demonstrate the complex mediations between reality and its cinematic representation. Each of these types points to a distinct use of translation as a critical concept for film analysis.

An example of the first type of translational film analysis, which examines the occurrence of translation during the production stage, is in Carol O'Sullivan's *Translating Popular Film* (2011). In this book, O'Sullivan explores the cinematic devices used by (mostly English-speaking) studios to

sustain "the dream of instantaneity and redundancy of translation" in cinema (2011, 40). The purpose of such devices – including, for instance, the translating dissolve (the "magical" replacement of foreign on-screen text by its English translation) or the sudden shift of a dialogue from a foreign language to the language of the cinematic narrative - is to manage linguistic difference without resorting to more overt forms of translation. In O'Sullivan's words (2011, 69), these devices "provide a way of acknowledging, and then dispensing with, heterolingual dialogue". In response to the audience's demand for realism, in sound film, translation must occur, but it must also be narrativized or otherwise represented so as not to disturb the impression of reality. O'Sullivan's analysis and the wealth of examples that she provides strongly intimate the studios' anxiety over the management of linguistic difference in film as well as their keenness to perpetuate "the idea that the cinematographic apparatus can transcend national languages" (2011, 62).

An example of the second type of translational film analysis, looking at what translation at distribution level can reveal about film, is Trinh T. Minh-Ha's (1992) theorization of subtitling in relation to the effect of suture in cinema. Minh-Ha's idea is not fully developed but it has been influential in audiovisual translation scholarship (Nornes 2007, 156; Pérez-González 2014, 51-52). Minh-Ha uses the Lacanian concept of suture as extended by film theorists such as Jean-Pierre Oudard, in order to explain the role of subtitles in constituting unified spectator-subjects. For suture theorists, one of the effects of continuity editing, typically the shot/reverse shot combination, is to create the impression that reality is fully offered to the spectator's gaze. The part of reality that the spectator does not see is that of the means of representation, most obviously the camera. During the viewing of such a film in translation, the impression of unmediated access to reality is dissipated by the subtitles (one could also argue, by the perceptible lack of synchrony in dubbing). As I have suggested elsewhere (Kapsaskis 2008), subtitles constitute a problematic means of representation, a visual obstruction that threatens to break the spell of immersion, by restoring awareness of the levels of mediation between spectator-subject and represented reality. Minh-Ha (1992, 207) points out that manipulation of subtitle duration is one of the devices used in order to mitigate this defamiliarizing effect and thus to perpetuate a "dominant, hierarchically unified worldview". In her view, this is because priority is given to *reading* the image rather than perceiving it as a fragmented experience of simultaneous "reading, hearing and seeing". Perhaps a better example is the technique of timing subtitles to shot-cuts, which sutures the subtitles along the same continuity principle as the shots. In the classical paradigm of a dialogue between two characters, each one of them "inhabits" (e.g. through close-ups) not only his or her shot, but also his or her subtitle, which ideally begins and finishes with that shot. Although the subtitle (the means of post-production) does not manage to eclipse itself as effectively as the camera (the means of production), the care taken in professional contexts in order to make it inconspicuous is a measure of the truth of Minh-Ha's argument. By projecting a unified representation or reality, Minh-Ha claims that "the attempt is always to protect the unity of the subject" (1992, 207). In this hypothesis, all aspects of production, including post-production and distribution, aim to represent a subjective, fragmented and artificial reality as if it were objective, unified and authentic. Minh-Ha's argument on film translation thus echoes Shochat and Stam's remark (1985, 41) that, during "the interlingual film experience […] as spectators we forge a synthetic unity which transcends the heteroglot source material". Minh-Ha's claim equally echoes Hansen's finding that, by establishing the unity of the spectator-subject, the universality of the representation is confirmed. To the seamless suturing of film characters, utterances and shots, we may add the seamless suturing of subtitles, ironically the prime indicator of linguistic difference. However defamiliarizing their effect might be in principle, subtitles contribute to the illusion of a cinematic Esperanto.

In both O'Sullivan and Minh-Ha, we have examples of how translation can be used as a critical tool in order to make valid statements that go beyond the theory and the practice of translation and reveal specific aspects of film as cultural institution and means of representation. While none of these examples is about the semantics, stylistics or cultural content of film translation, these aspects can also be used as resources to analyse cinema and individual films in ways that would not be possible were it not for the critical angle that translation provides.

In the following section, I will focus on a specific film that, for most viewers, is experienced in translation. Lanthimos' *Dogtooth* is a Greek film whose international recognition anticipated its positive reception in Greece. I will examine the importance of translation as a hermeneutic tool and a

narrative device in this film, before carrying out a critical analysis of its English subtitles through the prism of translation.

Dogtooth and the claim of absolute translatability

Dogtooth has received notable critical acclaim and was a modest box office success, having won the Cannes Film Festival "Un certain regard" award in 2009 and having been nominated for Best Foreign Language Film Academy Award in 2011. Even so, it has attracted relatively little scholarly attention. This is surprising, given that *Dogtooth* is the most recognizable film coming out of the so-called "Weird wave of Greek cinema" (Rose 2011), a loose grouping of Greek films which share such themes as dysfunctional families and societies, sexual politics in patriarchal contexts, and the crisis of identity as a result of Greece's perceived failure to embrace European modernity (see also Asimakoulas 2016). Some of these films are characterized by the use of grotesque expressive means, including the misuse and abuse of language. The stilted and unnatural language spoken by the characters of *Dogtooth* is one of the most striking features of its script, written by Efthimis Filippou. It will be the focus of my analysis of the film. Translation will be considered, firstly, as an interpretive concept; secondly, as a narrative theme; thirdly, as practice applied *on* the film in the form of subtitling; and, finally, as a practice applied *in* the film in the form of performative re-enactment of situations experienced by the characters.

Using a naturalist narrative style that maintains continuity and coherence, *Dogtooth* consists of a series of uncanny episodes involving a relatively well-off Greek family who live in a secluded estate with a large garden and a swimming pool in the outskirts of a city. Surveillance cameras at the father's workplace suggest that the narrative is set in the 2000's; inside the estate, however, the setting is more evocative of the 1980's. In addition to the despotic father, there is the mother, who seems to be a victim and a perpetrator in equal measure, and two daughters and a son, all in their twenties. Only the father is free to move in and out of this sheltered Eden-like setting as he pleases, while the three adult children ignore, fear and long for the outside world. As part of their home-schooling, they have to follow a regime of bizarre competitive tasks. A young woman, Christina, is regularly driven blindfolded to the house by the father to have sex with the son and, through her unsupervised interactions with the older daughter, involving sex in return for Hollywood blockbusters in videotapes, she instils in her the desire to escape. This daughter, having been taught that young people are ready to leave their family as soon as they lose a dogtooth, violently removes hers and leaves the house hidden in her father's Mercedes trunk. At the end of the film, the audience is left wondering whether the daughter has found freedom or she will be caught and punished for the hubris she committed.

Because of its abstract narrative and strong emotional impact, *Dogtooth* invites different allegorical readings that do not necessarily contradict each other. It is tempting to understand the film as a coming-of-age narrative modelled on the biblical theme of expulsion, where an Edenic state of introversion and order gives way to a state of exposure and Babelian chaos (see also Fisher 2011, 25). From a different perspective, in one of the most interesting articles on recent Greek cinema, Alex Lykidis (2015, 9) associated this film with "the decline of popular sovereignty in European politics [and] Greek peripheral modernity". Lykidis expanded on his point *inter alia* through reference to the control of language in Lanthimos' film as a defence mechanism against the feared dynamics of imported modernity in Greece. His Marxist-historical interpretation complements the mythical-psychological approach, while they can both be related to my earlier discussion on the assumption of translatability as it relates to ideas of appropriability and lingua-cultural domination. It is from this point of view that I shall begin the analysis.

The opening scene shows close-up a tape recorder which is used for the home-schooling of the three adult children. Later we find out that the recorded voice is that of the mother. She is teaching the children some common words which they could not have known because of lack of exposure and social interaction outside the family.

> Today the new words are the following: "Sea", "motorway", "excursion" and "carbine". A sea is a leather armchair with wooden arms like the one we have in our living room. For example: "Don't stand on your feet. Sit on the sea to have a quiet chat with me". A motorway is a very strong wind. An excursion is a very resistant material used to construct floors. For example: "The chandelier fell violently onto the floor but no

damage was caused to it because it is made of 100% excursion". Carbine. A carbine is a beautiful white bird.[1]

The audience soon realises that the teaching is incorrect since there are accepted referents for these signifiers that this lesson disregards. At the same time, the misnaming is possible because there is no necessary connection between signifier and signified – this is the Saussurean concept of the arbitrariness of the sign. The voice of the mother exploits the loose ties between surface markers and deep meanings in order to exercise its authority. Michel Chion (1982) has written on the authority attributed to the disembodied voice in cinema, the *acousmêtre*, a god-like being that sees and knows everything. In Chion's analysis of early sound films such as *The Testament of Dr Mabuse* and *The Wizzard of Oz*, the *acousmêtre* is ironically revealed to be a voice machine whose authority is fake. In *Dogtooth*, the voice-reproducing machine is exposed from the very first scene. The authority of the mother is known to be fake, but the audience can do nothing to divest her of it.

Now, if the act of naming is arbitrary, how do we know that the mother's teaching is untrue and morally wrong? After all, if we pursue the Edenic metaphor, in the archetypal act of naming in Genesis (2: 18-20), man is free to choose the names he wants "for every living creature". Here the translational perspective is helpful. The voice exercises authority not simply by imposing names but by employing a specific translation pattern, described by Fisher (2011, 27) as follows: "the outside (the ocean) is always converted into the inside (a leather armchair)". Unfamiliar words are translated using familiar concepts, a common strategy of domestication (Venuti 1995). An anti-Brechtian principle is at work: the children must not be alienated and their faith in the family as a mechanism capable of appropriating all possible experience must not be shaken. Thus, the film opens by communicating the paternal concern over the translatability of the world. Alterity and diversity must be monolingually reduced for the sake of good pedagogy. The role of the tape recorder is akin to that of instant translators used in science fiction, such as *Star Trek*'s Universal Translator. It serves what O'Sullivan (2011, 62) described a propos of sound film as "the dream of instant translation".

Dogtooth intimates the critical importance of translation from the start. The tape, the vocal delivery, the style and type of the spoken text are remindful of self-study language methods that Greeks used in the 1970's and 1980's. The difference is that, instead of a foreign language that is translated into the native tongue for learning purposes, here interpretations are given intralingually. This cultural reference contributes to "a sense of pitch-black humour" (Bradshaw 2010) that permeates Lanthimos' film. It creates a sense of ironic distance that only rarely leads to an outburst of laughter. Simon Critchley (2002, 106) has described this reaction as a "weaker Freudian laughter", "the sardonic and more sarcastic comedy of someone like Sterne, Swift or Beckett, which arises out of a palpable sense of inability, impotence and inauthenticity". Critchley explains that this form of laughter is caused by a false pretension to authenticity, that is, the impossible coincidence between the self and the reality that it claims as its own. As spectators of the film, we laugh (a weak laughter) at the awkwardness of the parents' efforts to keep their children in a protected state of authenticity. The naivety of foreign language learning methods lies in the idea of one-to-one equivalences between words belonging to different languages. Insofar as a translational critical perspective alerts us to this naivety, it also intimates the inauthenticity of the children, as well as the cruelty of the parents' pedagogical agenda.

In its more conventional sense of interlingual transfer, translation constitutes not just an interpretive concept but also a narrative device in the film. In one of the most comical yet poignant scenes, all members of the family listen to Frank Sinatra's song *Fly me to the Moon*, having previously been reminded that the singer is their grandfather. The father pretends to listen carefully to the lyrics and proceeds to a form of diegetic interpreting, or rather *mis*interpreting: "Dad loves us. Mom loves us. Do we love them? Yes, we love them. I love my brothers and sisters because they love me too. Spring fills my house. Spring floods my little heart". The lack of reference between language and reality is transposed to the level of the non-equivalence between source and target languages. Translation here is a form of taming of reality, a defence mechanism against the fear but also the seduction of the foreign, symbolized in the local context by Frank Sinatra. Going beyond the evident themes of the family syndrome and the problematic of emancipation, the narrative seems to make a statement about Greece's predicament as cultural periphery. The film asks us to think: Is the father's

mistranslation of Sinatra's song in any way telling of the uneven relation between Greece as periphery and centres of cultural production, such as Hollywood? Can the Greek mistranslation then reveal something about the cultural and aesthetic state of affairs in the West, rather than just about Greece?

The film presses further on the issue of translation. As it was mentioned earlier, the older daughter receives videotapes in return for sex with Christina, the visitor. These videotapes constitute the equivalent of the forbidden fruit (Fisher 2011, 27) that will trigger a sequence of events leading to the daughter's escape. She secretly watches the videotapes, which are *Jaws* (1975) and *Rocky* (1976), two seminal Hollywood blockbusters that were popular in Greece as soon as they were released, but also in the 1980's, precisely in the videotape format. The daughter is then seen re-enacting scenes from these movies. She violently punches her own jaw, mimicking boxing scenes from *Rocky* in which the eponymous character has his jaw ravaged by his opponent, and she recites a dialogue from *Jaws* about man-eating sharks. This is a proleptic reference to one of the final scenes where she knocks out one of her dogteeth, an act of violence against the self which, the daughter believes, will earn her her freedom. During these scenes, the daughter speaks the film dialogues in Greek. But what exactly is it that she says? In an email that the scriptwriter, Efthimis Filippou, sent to me on March 10, 2016, he confirmed that he had used the Greek subtitles of *Jaws* and *Rocky* in the old videotapes which the daughter is supposed to have secretly watched. In this way, translation enters the narrative yet again. The daughter's strong identification with the subtitles suggests that film translation has further justified the father's strategy of translating everything into the native language of home. The subtitled Hollywood films offer an even more convincing and hypnotic account of the world than the one he offers to his children.

Inspired by the subtitled films, the daughter resorts to a device that extends the logic of the paternal programme of complete translatability. If, as the father insists, everything is reducible to the native language, then there is no plurality of signification and a complete coincidence between language and reality is possible. This allows the daughter to pursue her project of emancipation by making a claim of absolute singularity and choosing a new name for herself. She insists on being called "Bruce", the nickname that the *Jaws* film crew used for the shark during the shooting of the film (although the daughter could not have known it). The choice of a proper name indicates the daughter's resolution to force a coincidence of referents and references. The proper name suggests a desire to do away with conceptual generality and to escape language as a code of signification. Writing about the biblical "Babel", Jacques Derrida referred to proper names as not strictly belonging to language.

> Now, a proper name as such remains forever untranslatable, a fact that may lead one to conclude that it does not strictly belong, for the same reason as the other words, to the language, to the system of the language, be it translated or translating. (Derrida 1985, 171)

Proper names carry within them a primordial understanding of language as a mechanism of naming objects in the world. Being identical to themselves, proper names are completely untranslatable. In this sense, the daughter's project of untranslatability of the self at the same time denies and confirms the father's project of complete translatability of experience. For him, all existence in its ambiguity can be reduced monolingually to the same; for her, everything has already been reduced to the same, ambiguity is transformed into identity, and cannot be translated any further.

Since this idea is inspired by the daughter's viewing of the Hollywood films, it is useful to compare it with Metz's account of the universality of the cinematic image, to which we also referred above. Metz (1991, 69) argues that "image discourse needs no translation, and that is because […] it is already translated into all languages: The height of the translatable is the universal". The world into which the daughter wishes to escape, the world of the properness of names and one-to-one correspondences, is therefore akin to that of the cinematic image. The same monoglot universalism characterizes both that image and the protected world proposed by the father. Hiding (in plain view) his mechanisms of suppression, the father offers a self-sufficient spectacle to his children, which parallels the cinematic dream of universal language. In that sense, Lanthimos' film is a moral tale warning us about the dangers of domestication and of the illusions of cinematic realism.

Given that *Dogtooth* lays bare some mechanisms of representation and the role of translation in them, a pertinent question would be how this film has itself been represented through audiovisual

translation. What issues are involved in the subtitling of a cultural product that thematizes translation, especially one that addresses the issues of cultural peripherality? In line with the main question of this article, what does the translation of such a film reveal about its form, function and content? In answering this question, it is worth bearing in mind that the majority of viewers will have seen the film with interlingual subtitles.

The linguistic aspect of the subtitles is interesting because of the particularities of the children's speech patterns, including repetition, use of clichés and a technocratic speaking style (Lykidis 2015, 13-15). An extra layer of interest is added by the fact that the translators are faced with cases of misnaming and mistranslation in the source dialogue. However, looking at the English subtitles, semantic transfer across languages does not seem to constitute a challenge. Take, for example, the following subtitles translating a dialogue between the son and the mother.

SON: Mom, what's a zombie?
MOTHER: A zombie is a small yellow flower.

These are translated almost verbatim from the Greek dialogue. Later in the film, the son looks at the grassy ground of the garden and appears to be focusing on something on it. He then says to his mother:

SON: Mom/ I found two little zombies. / Should I bring them to you?

This is also translated almost verbatim, even as the image leaves no doubt that the son has not seen anything like a zombie. There is no perceptual confusion, because the narrative has explained the act of (mis)naming and we are familiar with the mechanism of semiotic rupture at work. The effect is humorous in the ironic but also compassionate way that I described above. Perhaps laughter is partly due to the realization that misnaming is not only possible in the native language of the speakers, but survives intact in translation. To a great extent, the peculiar language of *Dogtooth* has been translated almost literally. The father's project of monolingualism and complete translatability is still operative at the level of interlingual translation. The success of his project extends beyond his immediate intentions and inhabits the English subtitles.

This is not a coincidence. The translatability of the dialogue is due to its strongly referential nature, the dearth of connotation and the exclusion of local cultural references. By minimizing contingency and ambiguity, this "international Greek" contributes to an excess of realism, since everything can be linguistically accounted for. An attractive hypothesis which will not be considered here in detail is that, partly, the language of the script is inspired by the long and under-researched tradition of Greek subtitling of foreign films to which the filmmakers pay homage through the direct quotation of the subtitles of *Rocky* and *Jaws*. After all, as Díaz Cintas and Remael (2007, 185) remind us, "Most subtitles display a preference for conventional, neutral word order, and simple, well-formed stereotypical sentences. Such sentences are the result of […] subtitling's concern with clarity, readability and transparent references". This is a fairly accurate description of the style of the Greek dialogue of *Dogtooth*, especially the lines spoken by the children. Whether this hypothesis holds or not, subtitling *Dogtooth* into English resembles an act of back translation, in that it returns back to the dominant language, English, a deformed version of its own cultural production. Nowhere is this more evident than in the comparison of the original dialogue of *Jaws* and *Rocky* with the English subtitles of the scenes in *Dogtooth* where the daughter performs the dialogue of these films. Only the excerpt from *Jaws* will be discussed here, for reasons of space.

Excerpt from *Jaws*	English subtitles of *Dogtooth* ("/" signifies change of subtitle)
HOOPER: Martin, there are all kinds of sharks in the waters, you know? Hammer heads, white tips, blues, makos and the chances that these bozos got the exact shark –	DAUGHTER: There are all types of shark./ Hammer shark/ blue, mako and white shark./ The chances of the imbeciles getting the right one.
MARTIN: Oh! Now, there's no other sharks like this	DAUGHTER: These types of shark aren't found

in these waters! HOOPER: Martin, Martin, it's a hundred to one. A hundred to one. Now I'm not saying that this is not the shark – MARTIN: Come on! HOOPER: It probably is, Martin, it probably is! It's a man-eater, it's extremely rare for these waters, but the fact is the bite radius on this animal is different than the wounds on the victim. I just, I want to be sure. You want to be sure. We all want to be sure. Okay?	here. DAUGHTER: It's very unlikely./ I don't mean that it isn't the shark we are looking for. (no subtitle) DAUGHTER: It probably is, Martin./ It's a man-eater!/ Its jaws are different from the bites on the victim./ I want to be sure. And you want to be sure./ We want to be sure, don't we?

The naturalistic dialogue of the original script of *Jaws* contains interruptions ("the exact shark-", "the shark-"), interjections ("Oh!"), phatic utterances ("Come on!"), repetitions ("Martin, Martin, it's a hundred to one. A hundred to one", "It probably is, Martin, it probably is"). In the English subtitles which translate the daughter's performance of this dialogue, these elements have been omitted or syntactically and grammatically corrected. Moreover, the marked language and the register have been neutralized, for instance "bozos" have become "imbeciles" and "bite radius" has become "jaws". While these forms of qualitative and quantitative impoverishment (Berman 2000, 291-292) are not rare in subtitling, in this case there is no significant departure from the Greek dialogue of *Dogtooth*. The daughter's words have been subtitled into English (right side of the table) almost verbatim. The impoverishment of the dialogue has rather occurred during the subtitling of the original *Jaws* (left side of the table) into Greek. For Greek speaking (and generally "peripheral") viewers, impoverishment seems to be a way of actively processing and possessing the dominant cinematic text, so as to simplify its significations and reduce them to their denotative values. We may choose to see this as a side effect of any translation process, regardless of translation type (audiovisual or otherwise) or directionality (centre to periphery or the opposite). However, the film insists on both of these accounts. The daughter's performance of the Greek subtitles of *Jaws* and *Rocky* is grotesque not simply because it is out of context, but because it exposes something of the absurdity of Hollywood's claim to realism and universality. Going through processes of linguistic adaptation and re-enactment, these films lose part of their aura, coherence and verisimilitude. With the help of the "impoverished" subtitles, *Dogtooth* makes a statement about film that shows each of its Greek-speaking and English-speaking audiences exactly where they belong in the global system of cultural production and consumption. Through specific translational processes such as subtitling, the (Greek) periphery distorts the realism and universalism of the dominant cultural product (here, *Jaws* and *Rocky*) and returns to the dominant culture a carefully refracted spectacle of itself. In this unsettling spectacle, Hollywood realism loses its spell and appears to the viewer - of both centres and peripheries - in all its grotesqueness.

This sinister translation of Hollywood does not only happen linguistically. The sequences explored above have a strong physical dimension, enhanced by the camera position, which often shows the bodies of the interlocutors, but not their heads. At some point in the film, the elder daughter re-enacts a dance sequence from *Flashdance* (1983), another Hollywood film of the same era, a scene about which Lanthimos pithily stated in an interview that "it's *Flashdance* freaked out" (Adams 2010). Indeed, the daughter's performance is so awkward and extravagant that, ultimately, it suggests an anomaly, a "freaked out" element that lies at the heart of the original film. Her performance deconstructs the realism of *Flashdance* and acts correctively, breaking the chain of cause and effect that characterizes mainstream cinematic realism. As Angelos Koutsourakis (2012, 104) noted, writing about the performative element in *Dogtooth* and Lars von Trier's *Dogville* (2003):

> von Trier's and Lanthimos' performative realism can be seen as a gesture of negativity; they intend to minimize dramaturgy so as to discover — to paraphrase Giorgio Agamben — the social gestures and the micropolitics of everyday life that have been smoothed by contemporary cinema's employment of technology as a reproductive tool.

Koutsourakis contrasts the performative realism of the peripheral films he discusses with the dramatic realism of Hollywood which remains largely committed to the paradigm of mimetic representation. As part of this gesture of negativity, translation is used as a device not for the *reproduction* of existing significations but for the *production* of cultural and political meaning through performative means. This is true of the creative appropriation in the film of dominant cinematic texts, such as *Jaws*, *Rocky*, and *Flashdance*, which are re-enacted linguistically or otherwise, in a way that denies mimetic representation. This is also true of the impoverished subtitles of *Jaws* and *Rocky*, in which the grotesque translation of those blockbusters strips the glamorous Hollywood images down to their unspectacular features.

The uses of translation in *Dogtooth* exemplify its importance as a critical concept in the exploration of key issues that relate to cinema as cultural institution and as means of representation. We have seen that specific strategies of translation inform the central metaphor of Lanthimos' film about family, pedagogy and the linguistic representation of experience; that translation serves as a narrative theme that helps raise questions about cultural centres and peripheries in a globalized world; and, finally, that translation is performed intra- and extra-diegetically in the film as a form of creative appropriation of mainstream cinematic aesthetics. An important advantage of using translation as a tool for film analysis is that it keeps us firmly at the intersection of synchrony and diachrony, form and content, geography and history. For example, such a critical perspective will not let us examine linguistic transfers independently of power asymmetries in global cultural production, or to theorize about film independently of specific languages and locales. Film analysis through a translational prism will examine issues of cinematic representation from the plural point of view of lingua-cultural difference and particularity. It will query the still dominant aesthetics and philosophy of film, including the claims of realism and universality, using a specifically translational awareness of the effect that these claims have on different local contexts. As a critical and hermeneutic concept, translation will show how the cultural periphery actively interrogates the mainstream paradigm of cinematic representation by submitting it to the extreme stress tests of linguistic adaptation and performative re-enactment. In the example of *Dogtooth*, we saw how a panoply of translation concepts, strategies and types were employed in order to articulate the film's thematics, including un/translatability, mistranslation, retranslation, subtitling and, in a wider sense, performative practices of re-appropriation and recasting. In this way, translation constitutes a valuable critical tool in identifying narrative and formal themes in individual films which are otherwise difficult to discern, and in nuancing the way we theorize about contemporary cinema in general.

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[1] Extracts from the film dialogue are based on the DVD subtitles with some minor typographical and punctuation adjustments.